

me & my flame--prologue###

by wild charizard

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Summary: What adventures lie in store on the mysterious Charizard Island?

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Prologue: PokÃ©mon on a Stick (Or: Remains of the Day)

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Last night's rain drops shook from the waist-high grass, wetting her legs as Jade took the narrow animal path away from her family's camp near the mountain slope. The trail faded into a valley watched by rocky cliffs rising bald from the green. The sun had just risen past the peaks, but her clothes were already sticky. Her binoculars dangled from her neck, her brand-new PokÃ©dex in her pocket. Her parents had gotten it, and her license, for her 10th birthday, knowing it would suit her hobby: studying PokÃ©mon, like themselves. They had finally gotten government permission to come here, to Charizard Island, for four weeks.

"Rapidash," she said under her breath, creeping through high grass for a better look at the small herd grazing in the distance, which she had seen yesterday. She stopped where the taller grass gave way to short, slapped a bug biting her upper arm and brought her binoculars up. She counted five Rapidash and two Ponyta; the biggest Rapidash looked to be the stallion. Though the ends of their flame tails swished and flared against the grass, nothing caught alight. Rapidash did not burn anything unless they wanted to. Little sense in torching your food.

One Rapidash reared up and whinnied. All took off down the field away from Jade, their hooves rumbling over the turf. A flock of Spearows rose shrieking from the grass in their path. Jade looked around, then up; a charizard was soaring high overhead. A winged shadow with orange body highlighted by slanted sunlight, trailed by a flame on the tip of its tail. Her stomach felt the bass of its

distant, drawn-out roar. Jade held her breath. The charizard did not swoop.

Only when the beast had flown past did she stand back up on shaking legs, scratching another bug bite on her bare shin. The Rapidash were gone. She pointed her Pokédex at the disappearing dragon; it told her only the sentence she already knew.

It was near noon, and getting hotter. She flapped the soaked front of her shirt against her chest, then fanned her face with her cap. Seeing that wild charizard had satisfied her for now. This land really was "burning with'em" as her dad said.

Something rustled the tall grass behind her. She turned around, and watched a large Rhyhorn shove its way through, flattening the green stalks under squat, stonelike feet. Seeing her, it snorted, standing between her and camp. It looked her straight in the eye.

Only after she had sprinted several yards up the field did she remember that the worst thing to do was run.

"Help!" Jade screamed, her legs pumping as fast as they could over the short grass. But she was beyond earshot, and the Rhyhorn was charging. Jade swerved at the last minute and it ran past her; as it stopped and turned around she hurled her binoculars at its frilled head. The Rhyhorn didn't seem to notice as they bounced off its armor.

Its harsh breath huffed behind her as she ran. "Help me!"

A huge shadow swooped over her, like an airplane--and with a forest-fire's roar. Her hair whipped back. Whirling around, she saw a charizard drop on the animal. A deluge of flames unfurled from its mouth as it bore down on the thick, armored neck. Yellow light flowered out around its sharp teeth as both monsters roared. She could not tell if it was the one who had flown by before. The Rhyhorn kicked and reared up, finally throwing the charizard off. Springing up on muscular legs, it jumped the Rhyhorn again, clawed feet scrabbling on the animal's armor. The Rhyhorn finally bucked it off, after the charizard had nearly smothered its face in fire. Grunting with each breath, it ran back away, crashing through the tall grass. And it was gone.

Jade realized she had been screaming the entire time.

The charizard's nostrils flared, its nose and mouth puffing steam as it bent over catching its breath. It raised its head to look at Jade, who still clutched the Pokédex.

"You saved me." It stood straighter and strolled towards her. When Jade took a step back, it stopped.

"You understand me?" Her voice cracked, hoarse from screaming.

A nod of the golden orange head, and a blink of sky-blue eyes. Judging by its horns, it was probably male. Her parents had always said charizards looked magnificent and possessed powers few could stand against in battle. But that their intellect ranked a notch or two above a Slowbro.

The charizard had gained his wind and was studying her as she studied him. She had a scratch on her knee and sweat half-plastered her straight black hair to her head. He inspected a scratch on his own arm, startling her when a rose of red flame gusted out his mouth. They must use fire to clean their wounds.

"Charizard," he said in a rumble so deep she could barely make out the word. His big feet waddled toward her; his tail swished laxly behind him.

Jade stepped to the side, starting to run. But if he wanted to eat her, he already would have; she couldn't escape by running any better than by standing still. As she approached, she thought she saw him smiling.

"Charizard." He approached her again. "Izard char char." She smelled a faint, reptilian odor, overpowered by brimstone, as he strode within a yard of her. He towered over her, with a big round body and long, thick tail. The insides of his huge wings were a lovely, rich sky-blue. He flapped them, partly unfolding them; she felt the refreshing if smelly breeze. He extended his left hand. "Char, izard chariz. Charizard?"

Despite the brimstone, she stepped over and took his hand, moving her fingers against the warm scales. "I can't understand you. But thank you, for saving my life. My name's Jade. Do you have a name?"

He nodded. "Char."

"Well, is it okay if I give you a nickname?"

"Char, izard." An amused smile curled his wide mouth, squinting his bright cerulean eyes.

"How about Blaze."

A shrug of his bony shoulders, a lazy nod. But he straightened up, his chest out. "Izard."

"I'm glad you like it." She looked beyond him, at the path back to camp. "Well, my parents might be worried about me. I have to go. But I'll see you soon, Blaze. Thank you again." Jade squeezed the orange-scaled, orange-clawed hand, unable to believe it was there in hers. As if to confirm it was flesh and blood, it squeezed back, the three clawed fingers closing round. Though it was gentle, she felt the strong, tough muscles.

"You have to be careful--my parents might hurt you if they saw you. Even though they're not trying to catch PokÃ©mon. They would get scared if you came too close--and I wouldn't be allowed to see you again. But if you want you can come back here tomorrow. I'll share my lunch with you."

Blaze did not come back the next day, when it rained heavily, but the day after that was clear and they shared Jade's noodle lunch in the heat of another sweltering day. In the shady tent of his wing, she handed him what was left in the container when she'd finished--almost enough for two--and his long pink tongue scooped it out in a couple sweeps. Even his tongue looked strong. After cleaning

the inside of the container he licked the sauce off his mouth. "You like it, huh."

Jade learned plenty about wild charizards the next four weeks, even being limited to yes-no questions. And her parents never suspected that she was doing her research in the company of a wild charizard. The only thing that caught their attention was that "funny smell."

When she learned Blaze was curious about why she was here, she said her parents were here to learn about PokÃ©mon. But she added that "they're going to be leaving very soon." She didn't say where they were staying, lest the word reach other PokÃ©mon, or Blaze should decide to defend anyone against them.

Mostly they wiled away time, lying in the hot sun, or Blaze gave her a ride. When she got the hang of it, she loved it.

She learned about Blaze himself. He lived with his parents most of the time, and would be ready to leave them when he became a better hunter. He was looking for a mate, but had not found her yet. There was a bully who picked on him, and an old charizard who didn't like him.

"Why does he not like you?" she asked. But she didn't understand his gesticulated attempt to explain.

"Are you saying you're not sure?"

"Char," he said, nodding.

Blaze arrived one day for lunch at their meeting spot with small, well-cooked pieces of meat on a stick, obviously a return for all those bites of sandwich and noodle lunches she'd given him. He held the stick out to her, enough for a whole meal.

"Thanks!" She tried one piece and was soon swallowing the last, and licking her fingers. "You're a great cook. What is it?" She realized it might have poisoned her for all she knew, but her stomach wasn't rebelling. Blaze crouched for her to climb on, and he flew her to a grassy field near a stream, not far away. Jade dismounted and followed him through the scratchy waist-high blades. "Char." He spanned his wings, grunting for her to stay where she was. He ran forward with a flap, and roared flames, frightening off a few Fearows and Spearows that had clustered over something. Jade took her hands off her ears and sauntered over, hearing flies buzz, and then closed her eyes, too late to avoid recognizing a Chansey with flies for eyes, mostly consumed. One of her favorite PokÃ©mon, so sweet and gentle. Who'd have thought it tasted so good?

"Blaze, how could you?" she said before reminding herself that he had to eat, and could not know she didn't eat Chansey.

His head cocked in confusion, the skin furrowing down over his bony brows. "Char, chariz?"

"I'm sorry." She swallowed a gag. "It was very nice of you."

She politely refused more, and sat a distance away, revolted by his hands and teeth ducking into the grass and rising smeared with

red, holding dripping meat. She clutched her stomach, gulping, smiling when he looked over. Blaze must have taken the hint, because he never took her to a kill site again. Why had he killed that Chansey yet saved her?

"I promise I'll see you again," said Jade on the day her family was leaving. She hugged Blaze's huge belly swollen by breakfast. For the last time her friend's hands stroked her hair and the back of her shirt. "I'll miss you, Blaze. But I'll see you again when I'm older."

She had no idea.

Blaze gave her a last squeeze. "Charizard." He flapped his huge wings, the breeze lifting her hair as he flew up and away.

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><dd> Years passed; Jade's interest in wild PokÃ©mon waned, as it often does. She married, raised a daughter, and worked at a good job. She retired in comfort, her daughter a successful Eevee breeder. But once in a while she pulled out the little album of pictures she had snapped of Blaze on that long-ago trip. Through her reading glasses she squinted at those bright blue eyes. Charizards lived for thousands of years. How was he doing, what was he up to? Did he remember her?

And what was his real name?

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